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Developing and institutionalising the ‘Internationally-Minded School’: The role of the ‘Numerous Fs’

Abstract

The concept and theory of ‘international mindedness’ has been much discussed and debated in recent years. The conceptualising of the character of ‘international mindedness’ as practiced by schools has begun to attract some scholarly attention, but one especially under-theorised aspect involves the often-derided ‘Several Fs’ (flags, festivals, food etc.). This paper aims to give credibility and importance to the day-to-day aspects of the ‘Several Fs’ and draws attention to the broader range of activity, identifying upwards of 15 ‘Fs’ in practice. The broader framework of the ‘Numerous Fs’ is then placed at the centre of identifying the nature and form of the school, as a deliverer of ‘international mindedness’. In a ‘low-culture context’, where collective-identity is undermined by transient and relatively distanced stakeholders, the ‘Numerous Fs’ can be viewed as acting as significant ‘purveyors of organisational identity’. At another level, the ‘Numerous Fs’ give considerable legitimacy to a school’s claim to be ‘Internationally-Minded’, acting as ‘carriers of institutionalisation’. Put simply, they give the school a distinct set of norms, activities, artefacts and routines, characterising it as a specific type of educational institution. As well as acting as practical every-day tools for developing the ‘Internationally-Minded School’ they arguably help to give the school a considerable degree of legitimacy both as an organisation, and as an institution.

Introduction: A complex context

The emerging challenges

Many schools around the world are facing the challenge of developing into being identified or classified as an ‘Internationally-Minded School’ (Hill, 2000). A growing body of public schools are currently involved in the process of developing into an ‘Internally-Minded’ institution. It is worth considering that in Chicago alone, 46 public schools in 2018 were offering one or more International Baccalaureate (IB) programmes. The ‘internationalisation of public schooling’ gathers pace in many nation-states and has begun to attract greater scholarly attention, although the scene is relatively still unexplored. This process is not an easy or natural one for many public schools, and indeed is still very much a ‘novelty’ for some (Dvir et al, 2018). It is acknowledged (Yemini and Fulop, 2015 p.531), in the context of Israel for example, that some ‘internationalised’ public schools face challenges: ‘internationalisation within local schools is a complex process that poses many challenges.’ Some of these challenges involve institutional barriers.

At another level, many schools that might view themselves, or claim to be, the ‘Internationally-Minded School’ face the further challenge of ‘proving it’. This is especially an issue for the rapidly expanding body of K-12 private English-Medium of Instruction schools that operate largely outside an English-speaking nation, deliver a non-national curriculum, and might therefore broadly be classified as ‘International Schools’. The growth of that market worldwide over the past decade has been unprecedented, and it is this field of relatively elite private education that my paper is directly concerned with.

As a quick indicator of growth, consider the comment that between 2000 and 2017, the number of such schools in Thailand grew from 12 to 180 (Machin, 2017 p.131). The number of schools globally is expected to hit 10,000 in 2019, and it is anticipated that the number could further double over the next decade as the complex forces of the current wave of globalisation driving the demand are increasingly met by neo-liberal policy-making in nation-states facilitating the growth in supply (Bunnell, 2019).

The proliferation of schools either being identified as, or claiming to be, ‘International’ has led to a cynical narrative, sometimes directly questioning the legitimacy of some institutions. For example, in the context of sudden growth in Sri Lanka it has been suggested that ‘there has been a profusion of independent primary and secondary education institutions claiming to be ‘International Schools’’ (Wettewa, 2016 p.67). Further, it has been said about Vietnam, where national-policy making is certainly creating a momentum behind growth, that: ‘Some of these schools provide world-class education...others offer little more than a place to drop your kids off during the day and a building with the words ‘International School’ tacked on’ (Mueller and Tatarski, 2014).

This is not a new issue and was even being discussed over a decade ago: ‘We are all now aware that the title *International* is used by many schools without any real justification...’ (Jackson, 2005 p.22). This issue seemingly reached public attention during the surprising attack on the field by government agencies in Indonesia in April 2014 (see *Jakarta Times*, 2014), which led to schools there, even well-established ones, having to actually drop the title ‘International’ (e.g. Jakarta *Intercultural* School has appeared, instead).

This important issue of legitimacy being openly and directly questioned has been raised, and partly tackled by the introduction and adaptation of ‘Institutionalization Theory’ (Bunnell, Fertig and James, 2016). This has led to the subsequent discussion of the ‘Institutional Primary Task’, specifically the delivery of an international curriculum that facilitates ‘International Mindedness’ (IM), or a similar set of values, skills and attributes. It has been argued (Bunnell, Fertig and James, 2017) that such practice adds considerably to giving credence to a school’s claim to be viewed legitimately as an ‘International’ institution since it delivers and promotes a specific set of norms, rules and procedures some of which are regulated whilst others become normal, or expected. Thus, over time an isomorphic process occurs, giving form and substance to a distinct identity.

The complex and problematic context described above, involving both public and private schooling, adds some urgency to the need to consider what IM can and should look like in practice. It has been argued (Lai, Shum and Zhang, 2014 p.78) that:

‘As the concept of International Mindedness becomes increasingly significant in education, it is essential to understand how constructs of International Mindedness apparent in written, documented curricula become enacted in teaching and learning contexts.’

However, IM remains a complex concept for many commentators. Indeed, in the eyes of some people, it may even be unachievable in practice. One reviewer of the literature (Cause, 2011 p.35) concluded that:

‘The risk is that the deficiency of literature, along with the clashing themes may lead educators to the idea that the term International Mindedness is too vague and cannot be achieved.’

The International Baccalaureate (IB) organisation has recognised this issue, and has said (IB, 2008 p.3) that:

‘The attempt to define International Mindedness in increasingly clear terms, and the struggle to move closer to that ideal in practice, are central to the mission of IB World Schools.’

This is especially important for ‘Elite Traditional International Schools’ i.e. the body of ‘International Schools’ offering one or more of the four programmes of the IB (Lee and Wright, 2016), since it is arguably central to identifying their ‘Institutional Primary Task’.

At the same time, the concept of IM as practiced in schools tends to be viewed within a narrow and rather simple lens of activity. The literature on IM tends to identify it with the day-to-day rituals and routines of flying *flags*, or offering different *foods*. It has become normal to identify IM, as practiced by schools, partly through the metaphor of the ‘Several Fs’. Further, they are often derided and dismissed, being viewed as the lowest degree of inter-cultural activity. Walker (2004 p.3), for example, refers to the ‘somewhat disparagingly labelled “Five Fs” of International Mindedness.’ This reveals a clear academic challenge. How can we make the development of the ‘Internationally-Minded School’, especially via the operation of the ‘Several Fs’, seem normal and important? Moreover, how can the activity be theorized and better understood as an important process?

The aims of this paper

This paper has several rather ambitious aims. First, as already stated, there is a clear need to locate and place the maligned ‘Several Fs’ as a central, and important day-to-day process of internationalizing a school in practice. I would add that I do believe this activity *per se* does not deliver IM, but it substantially adds credence to an institution’s claim that it aims to deliver it i.e. on its own it is not enough, yet it is important. In this regard, I would agree with Skelton et al (2002) when they state that there is a need to go *beyond* the ‘Five Fs’. However, the ‘Fs’ do need, and deserve, conceptualising as an important part of the overall process towards delivering IM. Second, and inter-connected, my paper will show that the concept, in practice, involves far more than just ‘*Several Fs*’. In fact, I will identify a much broader framework involving ‘*Numerous Fs*’.

I will then offer a positive case for viewing the ‘Numerous Fs’ as essential ingredients for a school legitimately being viewed as, or claiming to be, an ‘Internationally-Minded School’. I will do this in two ways. First, I will place the ‘Numerous Fs’ within the broader organisational framework offered by Hall (1976), within his framework of ‘low-culture context’. In this context, the ‘Numerous F’s act as essential ‘purveyors of organisational identity’. Then, I will apply the Institutionalisation Theory framework offered by Scott (2014), building on the work by Bunnell, Fertig and James (2016, and 2017) to show how the ‘Numerous Fs’ are essential ‘carriers of institutionalisation’. They carry forward a set of prescribed, normal, and expected activities, artefacts, and routines which give the organisation a sense of legitimacy at an institutional level. This is a totally original approach to viewing the ‘Fs’, and this framework can be further developed by scholars.

Lastly, I aim to argue the case that this discussion needs a much deeper, sociological inquiry. In short, how does this activity affect all the agents (educators, children parents etc.) that have contact with the school? Do they, in turn, become institutionalised?

The concept of ‘International Mindedness’

The concept in theory

There is no denying that IM is an essential ingredient of an ‘international education’. The central importance of the concept of IM has been acknowledged, and much discussed. It has been noted by some that: ‘The concept of International Mindedness has become a staple within the context of international schooling’ (Savva and Stanfield, 2018 p.179). Drawing attention to its history dating back to the 17th Century, one author (Hill, 2012 p.246) has argued the case that IM is crucial:

‘International Mindedness is the key concept associated with an international education.

Stated another way, it can be said that the product of a successful international education is International Mindedness.’

Schools authorised as ‘IB World Schools’, for example, are expected to interweave the IB mission with the school one; the current IB mission states that:

‘The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.’

Significantly, Singh and Qi (2013) identify ‘intercultural understanding’ as one of the ‘three pillars’ constituting IM in IB documentation. Moreover, the official document ‘What is an IB Education’ explicitly states (IBO, 2015 p.i) that:

‘The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world.’

The document ‘IB Standards and Practices’ (IBO, 2011 p.13) stipulates that an IB World School must ‘develop and promote International Mindedness and all attributes of the IB Learner Profile across the school community.’ But, the IB’s programmes are not the only ‘international curricula’ on offer to schools worldwide. One might conceivably find that schools offering the International Primary Curriculum (IPC), an over-looked programme that has been a leading player in England’s public schools for over a decade, also have IM within their mission statement since it is a deliberately integrated and designed aspect of the curriculum (Pletser, 2012).

However, in spite of its acknowledged importance, IM in general poses considerable conceptual hurdles, which given that it has appeared in literature for almost 100-years (e.g. Mead, 1929) might seem quite ironic. Yet, it is noted how: ‘recent conceptualizations attest to the fuzziness of the concept’ (Tarc, 2019 p.489). Perhaps not surprisingly therefore, it is acknowledged that: ‘Literature devoted to the development of International Mindedness is exceptionally scarce’ (Cause, 2011 p.35).

It is seen to be a difficult concept to grasp either in theory or practice. One comment made is that: ‘Providing a succinct definition for this concept, let alone an assessment of it, has proved to be a slippery proposition at best’ (Savva and Stanfield, 2018 p.179). A review of literature on the topic as presented within the environment of the ‘IB World’ concluded that: ‘The conceptualisation of International Mindedness as a basis for internationalising education is a problem’ (Singh and Qi, 2013 p.vi).

One concise view is that: ‘International Mindedness is an abstract concept’ (Lai, Shum and Zhang, 2014 p.88). It is stated by Cause (2011 p.37) that there is a need for more study and research to be undertaken on the ‘construction’ of IM in practice. Further comment says that: ‘there is not yet any clear social consensus of how it manifests itself or how it can be effectively negotiated’ (Hurley, 2008 p.140). One study (Poonoosamy, 2016 p.595) concluded that ‘students understood International Mindedness as an aim, but the tension is that it was not realized as a process.’

Overall, we can see from a study of the relevant literature that a cynical view often exists about IM, implying that it is too abstract and ‘fuzzy’ to be implemented successfully in a school. The task to disprove this, and prove that it does actually have substance and can be identified in practice in many schools is an important one and forms the bed-rock of my paper.

The concept in practice

Work is in progress to conceptualise what IM might look like in practice, as evidenced in schools. One report (Barratt Hacking et al, 2017 p.8) concluded, after visiting nine IB schools, that IM was variously described as ‘a way of thinking’, ‘a way of acting’, ‘a way of living’, and ‘a mind-set.’ It was seen as a deliberate ‘journey’, involving both the school and the agents within it acting as role-models. It was noted (Barratt Hacking et al, 2017 p.10) that in practice:

‘They were all intentionally thinking about and actively working on the conceptualisation and development of IM: it was not something that was taken for granted or left to happen as a result of adopting an IB programme. It was planned through the school’s vision, strategy, policy and practice.’

This immediately reveals that much of the aforementioned commentary about IM might be viewed as being over-stated, and somewhat exaggerated. The schools in the report mentioned above clearly believe they are doing it. That report had also identified that, in practice:

‘These activities mainly comprised the superficial sociability of sharing and celebrating the so-called 5 Fs (food, flags, festivals, fashion and famous people). Whilst the potential value and enjoyment of such activities were recognised, most of the case study schools had ventured beyond such events’ (Barratt Hacking et al, 2017 p.10).

This reveals a common-held view. The ‘Several Fs’, on their own, receive little praise and are often largely dismissed as superficial ‘token gestures’. One online document published by an Australian company (see www.goodrunsolutions.com.au) titled ‘*Avoiding the Deadly Five Fs*’ states that:

‘Many educators make the effort to ensure that backgrounds of children and their families are represented with visual displays such as flags from the different countries... The thought behind this is well intentioned –by creating an environment that reflects the national and cultural heritage of children, we are honouring their cultural diversity, we are respecting their traditions, practices and beliefs.’

It is worth noting the rather condescending point about ‘well-intentioned’. However, this document goes further, by saying that:

‘The thing that makes these five “Fs” deadly is the tendency of early childhood professionals to believe that we have ‘done enough’.

Further, this document states that the ‘Several Fs’ amount to little more than:

‘Tokenism, focusing on a “tourist-like” approach to understanding and appreciating multicultural and multi-faith diversity in our society.’

Another perspective (Skelton et al, 2002 p.53) is to sympathise with schools that focus on the ‘Fs’, and imply it is ‘better than nothing’:

‘But we can sympathize with schools that concentrate on these aspects, given the difficulty of trying to reach consensus on any other approach to international education.’

It is sometimes viewed that the ‘F’ lack frequency or depth:

‘Student interactions with other cultures should be genuine, frequent and should not be oriented too much towards the ‘Five Fs’ (Carder, 2009 p.103).

In short, the ‘Several Fs’ are often portrayed in literature as involving a relatively small set of activities, and are rarely identified as deep and meaningful. Further, surprisingly little attempt has been made to defend, or moreover, theorise this activity. Next, the concept of the ‘Several Fs’ will be explored, and developed within a larger and arguably more realistic framework.

Conceptualising the ‘Several Fs’

The concept of the ‘Several Fs’ is not a new one, and can be traced back at least two decades, when Begler (1998) referred to ‘food, festival, fashion, famous people and folklore’. As seen already, sometimes the concept is termed the ‘*Four* Fs’. For instance, Tamatea (2008 p.69) refers to a school in Malaysia offering ‘little more than the Four F’s approach to intercultural understanding (food, fashion, folklore and facts).’ Others, as we have also seen, prefer a ‘*Five* Fs’ model. Indeed, an exhaustive search of the literature by myself shows that five items does tend to be most popular. Thier (2013 p.50), for example, used Walker’s (2004) typology; the ‘Five Fs’ in both cases being ‘Food, Festivals, Famous People, Fashion, and Flags’.

However, my review of the literature further reveals there are lots of ‘Fs’. An over-looked fact is that commentators are rarely referring to the same set of ‘Fs’. Indeed, this point has never previously been noted. It is generally normal to identify ‘Flags’, ‘Food’, ‘Festivals’ and ‘Fashion’, however the last ‘F’ can differ. Shunnarah (2008), for example, identifies a set of ‘Food, Fashion, Festivals, Folklore, and Flags’, thus further adding ‘Folklore’ (or ‘Fables’, Folktales’) to the above listing. Doorly (2015 p.114), on the other hand, adds ‘Fundraising’ to the listing, whilst Healey (2016) refers instead to ‘Faiths’. In other words, there are actually ‘*Numerous* Fs’. This immediately adds greater substance to their importance.

Further, the ‘Fs’ are often quite multi-dimension. There are, for examples, two types of ‘Flags’ since the ones fluttering outside the school are normally joined by a static/fixed display within. The classrooms I taught in for 25 years certainly displayed a lot of flags, which changed over time reflecting the diversity of student body. Further, there are also two types of ‘Food’, since many schools hold an annual, large-scale ‘Food Festival’ but also deliberately alternate the school canteen food in a normal week/month to acknowledge the different nations represented within the student body. In my personal experience, the ‘Food Festival’ can be anticipated as a major school event, holding a central place in the yearly calendar.

Further, many ‘Elite Traditional International Schools’ portray much imagery and artefacts on the classroom wall and in corridors. In particular, there is often two sets of ‘Faces’ portrayed, representing either fictional or factual persons. Evidence from IM in theory, as presented in IB documentation (Singh and Qi, 2013; Castro, Lundgren and Woodin, 2015), would show that ‘Foreign languages’ constitute another ‘F’, since multilingualism is considered to be an essential player within the ‘Three Pillars of IM’ framework. A broader ‘Numerous Fs’ framework, based on my survey of the literature, is shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: The ‘Numerous Fs’ in practice

Type of ‘Fs’	Examples of activity
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Flags (actually two types)	The ‘Fluttering Flags’ are displayed outside the school. The ‘Fixed Flags’ are displayed on walls in classrooms and corridors.
Food (actually two types)	‘Featured Food’ involves the school canteen, which might feature a type of food on a regular basis. An annual ‘Food Festival’ involves the whole school community showcasing its national dishes.
Foreign Languages	The school might offer an array of ‘Foreign Languages’ to students’, such as Mandarin.
Faces (actually two types)	The school may display posters around the school representing ‘Fictitious Faces’ of people from different cultures and peoples. It may also display images of ‘Factual Faces’, representing famous people such as Nelson Mandela.
Fantasy	The school might have extra-curriculum activities, such as Model United Nations (‘MUN Clubs’), where students’ debate issues whilst ‘fantasizing’ about ‘representing’ a UN-nation member-state or multi-lateral organisational body (e.g. UNESCO).
Features	The Year-Book, a staple of many schools features the events and people from the school-year.
Folklore/Fables/Folktales	The students learn stories from other countries, including the host-nation.
Foreign Trips	The school might offer an annual trip to an overseas country, for maybe a week, to learn about that nation’s culture and history.
Fundraising	Some schools have a ‘Charity Club’, raising funds for a country that the school has links with.
Faiths	Students might study a nation’s religion (maybe that of the ‘host country’), or that of the students’ themselves.
Fine Arts	The school might a study art-work from different nations

Within the somewhat forced yet arguably realistic framework above, representing for many schools ‘every-day action’, the ‘Four/Five Fs’ morphs into a broader array of ‘Numerous Fs’. There is scope for adding further ‘Fs’ (e.g. ‘Famous events, Family, Films etc.’), increasing the listing to as many as ‘15 Fs’.

This broader framework might sound contrived, yet it can represent a normative model of behaviour for some schools, especially those that aim and claim to be ‘Internationally-Minded’. In *practice*, some of those schools might offer all the ‘Fs’ mentioned above as routine, normal manifestations of school-

life. I can certainly relate to them as norms within the academic and social calendar of the schools I have worked in.

One could even contrive that ‘Philosophy statement’ might constitute a further (sounding like) ‘F’ (a bit like the ‘3 Rs’), since one might expect to find IM included within an ‘Internationally-Minded School’ mission statement, or the broader Guiding Statements. Further, one might also cynically argue that ‘Futuristic vision’ might constitute another ‘F’ since the school mission statement tends to be focused on the medium-to-long term future rather than the immediate point in time (i.e. ‘The generation of young people that will go on to do...’).

The serious academic point to observe here is that the ‘Several Fs’ framework can, and arguably should be developed and further conceptualised. Of course, there is also scope for moving beyond merely identifying activities beginning with the letter ‘F’, but this metaphor has substantially entered the literature domain and arguably has now developed a degree of substance, and depth of meaning. However, even the mere ‘Fs’ in practice actually covers a considerable amount of routine activity for many schools. Moreover, my paper will next show that such activity acts as a powerful institutionalising force.

The role of the ‘Numerous Fs’

Facilitating *organisational* identity

The ‘Numerous Fs’ represent the most visible, tangible aspects of a school’s culture. The famous ‘iceberg’ metaphor, developed by the American anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1914-2009) in his 1976 book *Beyond Culture* would identify the ‘Numerous Fs’ as representing the top (i.e. ‘the tip’) 10% of the iceberg, made up of ‘visible culture’. Below the iceberg lies the ‘values’ (Savva, 2015), and others (e.g. Fennes and Hapgood, 1997) have identified this as the ‘unconscious’ aspects of culture.

However, Hall also developed in his 1976 book the notion of ‘high-culture context’ and ‘low-culture context’ (see Kim, Pan and Park, 1998). This framework is less well-known, but is useful in the context of conceptualising the role of the ‘Numerous Fs’. In a ‘low-culture context’ environment, little understanding or interpretation of the nature of the organisation is taken for granted and the intended culture is explicitly and visually portrayed. This context applies especially to internal environments where there is much turnover of persons, with new entrants constantly appearing who may or may not be sure of the cultural context. Further, there might exist an external environment that does not fully understand the nature and identity of the organisation.

One can immediately see here that ‘Elite Traditional International Schools’, serving in the main globally mobile stakeholders (parents, students, and educators) within an independent and often isolated

environment would certainly constitute an organisational context where a ‘low-culture context’ is both necessary, and evident. It is accepted that this type of organisation has a high turnover of stakeholders, and is often isolated within the local community within a form of ‘cultural bubble’. It is said that: ‘International Schools are inherently transient environments’ (Savva and Stanfield, 2018 p.190).

The role of the ‘Several F’s in facilitating a ‘low-culture context’ is shown in Table 2 below, showing examples in practice. This framework has been adopted from a model developed by the website Changing Minds (available at http://changingminds.org/explanations/culture/hall_culture.htm).

Table 2: The role of the ‘Numerous Fs’ within a ‘low-culture context’

Organisational factors	Low-culture Context	The role of the ‘Fs’
Overtmess of messages.	The messages need to be overt. They must be very clear and simple.	The ‘Fluttering Flags’ convey a simple and highly visible message to the external public that this is not a ‘normal’ public school, and tells the internal public that it respects other identities.
Locus of control and attribution for failure.	The messages need to be controlled by agencies that will accept responsibility for failure, without blaming the school.	The ‘Food Festival’ is usually controlled by a committee dominated by parents i.e. the school hands control of the event over to stakeholders within the school community, showing trust and respect whilst no single culture dominates the proceedings.
Use of communication.	The messages need be conveyed through written and verbal communication.	The annual ‘Festivals’ involve film, story-telling, folklore and songs. They are immortalised within the ‘Year-Book’, accompanied with factual text. This can help showcase the school ‘in-action’.
Expression of reaction.	The messages need to elicit a visible, outward reaction.	The ‘Festivals’ can promote discussion among stakeholders, and offer an opportunity/excuse for external (e.g. press) coverage.
Cohesion and separation of groups.	The messages need to meet the needs of flexible, open and changing stakeholder groups.	The events and activities offered by the ‘Festivals’ are determined by the existing cultures, and are not the same each year. The ‘Fluttering Flags’ can be changed each week

		to reflect the changing constituents of the student body.
People bonds.	The messages need to build bonds between groups with little internal loyalty.	The ‘Festivals’ can bring the entire school community together, offering an annual sense of cohesion and unity.
Level of commitment to relationship.	The messages need to be fluid enough to be quickly and easily changed.	The ‘Fluttering Flags’ can be quickly hoisted or taken down. New flags can be easily be deployed, as new relationships appear.
Flexibility of time.	The messages need to be rigidly timed, and organised. Routines need to be set.	The ‘Fluttering flags’ can be replaced regularly. Festivals are integrated into the school Calendar as normative activities.

Within this framework, the ‘Several Fs’ purvey clear and simple messages to both the internal and external communities. This is important, since the messages need to be overt and easily understood. The routines need to be predictable and rigid, conveying a continuity of message. The ‘Numerous Fs’ offer this sense of continuity, as the processes are regular and routine. Further, the ‘Numerous Fs’ are flexible in the sense that they can be adapted, quickly and discretely i.e. new flags can easily replace old flags.

The ‘Numerous Fs’ offer a sense of community and bond between stakeholders that change often, and rarely meet. The activities offer an opportunity for the whole school community to meet and chat, plus they give the school an opportunity to invite guests (e.g. the Town Mayor) and encourage local-press coverage. The ‘Numerous Fs’, over the course of the school-year, offer a showcase for the school ‘in-action’, and give opportunity for different stakeholders to get involved in the school (e.g. some parents might organise the annual Food Festival, helped by the School Council). Put together, this is a powerful set of processes purveying a strong sense of identity as an organisation. They offer the organisation a sense of purpose, identity, and cohesion which otherwise might be lacking or distant.

Facilitating *institutional* identity

We can take the concept further. Recent discussion (Bunnell, Fertig, and James, 2016) has drawn upon the work of the American sociologist William Richard Scott, particularly the notion that institutions are social structures that ‘provide stability and meaning to social life’ (Scott 2014, p. 56). This discussion, taking its cue from the aforementioned events in Indonesia in April 2014, took the stance that legitimacy

is an important concept in distinguishing between an ‘organisation’ and an ‘institution’. In short, an organisation becomes an institution through a *process* of institutionalisation.

Scott (2014) argues that this process involves three distinct elements: regulative; normative; and, cultural-cognitive. He refers to these as ‘pillars’ since they underpin and support the institutionalisation process. The ‘Regulative Pillar’ is made up of those influences associated with rule setting, monitoring and sanctioning i.e. ‘we do it because we have to.’ The ‘Normative Pillar’ comprises values and norms that are not prescribed but are normally evident i.e. ‘we do it because it is expected’. The ‘Cultural–cognitive Pillar’ involves a shared image and set of expectations i.e. ‘we do it because others are doing it’.

In turn, the three pillars are conveyed and communicated by means of ‘carriers’. Scott (2014) identifies four types of carrier: symbolic systems; relational systems, activities, and artefacts. The table below shows how the ‘Numerous Fs’ in practice can be conceptualised within the ‘Pillars and Carriers Model’.

Table 3: The role of the ‘Fs’ as carriers of institutionalisation.

Carriers	The Regulative Pillar	The Normative Pillar	The Cultural-Cognitive Pillar
Symbolic Systems	The portrait of the host-nation’s Monarch must be displayed in the school entrance.	Portraits of famous people are displayed within the school, representing global role models from countries represented within the school population e.g. Ghandi, Churchill, Mandela.	Portraits of certain types of people are displayed, representing humankind.
Relational Systems	National Day is observed and the school must be closed.	Other important National Days are observed, reflecting the Embassies involved with the school.	A multi-national event is observed such as ‘UN Day’, alongside an annual ‘World Cultures Day’. The whole school participates.
Activities	The National Anthem of the host-nation must be sung, either each day or on a special occasion.	The School-lunch offers different themes, reflecting the food and	A festival is held annually celebrating the songs, food and

		tastes of the school community	traditions of the whole school community.
Artefacts	The host-nation flag has to be hoisted, and even lowered, each day.	The flags of the school community are displayed, perhaps one-by-one	The United Nations flag or regional trade bloc flag is displayed, perhaps permanently. A flag representing a network of schools is flown. This creates an image that the school is part of a bigger movement of schools, with a global outlook.

A real-world example eases the point being made. I know of an ‘Elite Traditional International School’ that has three flags displayed outside the entrance to the school: the national flag; the ‘local’ flag representing the local State; and a flag that changes each week representing the nationalities of the school community. These three flags have different roles. The flying of the national flag in some countries might be mandatory, a ‘Regulatory Artefact’. The flying of the ‘local’ flag could be seen as a normal thing to do, although not a regulation as such. The third flag is very symbolic, and definitely might be viewed as a ‘Normative Artefact’ communicating to the outside world that the school community is very diverse and is not a ‘regular’ type of school.

A fourth flag could have been added by this school, and it could have displayed a universally recognised flag such as the one representing the United Nations. In a south East Asian nation such as Thailand it could be the flag representing ASEAN. This would be a ‘Culturally-Cognitive Artefact’ in the model above, showing the outside world that the school has a certain belief-system whilst acting as a unifier of the diversity within the school community; it acts as a message of expected, normative behaviour, beyond that which is regulated. In other words, one should expect this school to be different from the others nearby, yet it may also be connected to a bigger movement of schools (worldwide) who share a belief-system.

The key point to observe here is that the displaying of flags is actually quite a complex process involving some that have to be displayed, those that normally might and others that add considerable substance to the ‘International’ label of the school since others elsewhere might be flying them. Together, they form a powerful set of messages adding weight to the legitimacy of the institution claiming to be ‘Internationally-Minded’. Put simply, the ‘Fluttering Flags’ can be seen as an essential

‘carrier of institutionalisation’. Without them, an institution’s claim to be an ‘Internationally-Minded’ school can be viewed as flimsy, and dubious. This is a fresh perspective, at odds with the usual comment that the flying of flags is superficial, and tokenistic.

Taking the issue further

My paper offers a theoretical basis for viewing the ‘Numerous Fs’ in practice as a deep and powerful institutionalising force, which is arguably lacking in literature and research discussion where the emphasis tends to be on IM in theory as an abstract and messy, incomplete concept with little substance. Moreover, in practice, through every-day and normal-routine activities, events and artefacts the ‘Numerous Fs’ add legitimacy to a school’s claim to be an institution that delivers and promotes IM. Put simply, the ‘Numerous Fs’ have a potential depth and effect that is not generally acknowledged by the literature on IM which arguably tends to exaggerate the complexity of the concept.

However, the topic can be taken further and viewed within a much broader lens. A sociological inquiry needs to consider the unintended consequences of developing and institutionalising the ‘Internationally-Minded School’ through the adoption of the ‘Numerous Fs’. In particular, there is a strong argument for moving beyond merely identifying the effect on the school. A much deeper sociological lens is required which identifies how the activity might (over time) affect the children, parents and educators within the school. If the school is institutionalised, it makes sense to assume that the agents within it also become ‘Internationally-Minded’, adding distinction, elevation of status and self-identity. This issue, involving the unintended institutionalisation of agents within the school, has never been fully discussed or explored.

A sociological imagination approach thus becomes a necessity. How do these ‘Numerous Fs’, in practice and as consequence of every-day reality, affect agents within the field? What are the long-term effects of constant exposure to ‘consensual rituals’ (Bernstein, Elvin, and Peters, 1966) such as annual ‘food festivals’? There is an argument for saying that the process of developing the ‘Internationally-Minded School’ offers a potential platform for class-formation. It is suggested (Basaran and Olssen, 2018 p.98) that the concept of being ‘International’ could offer prestige, and symbolic value:

‘Becoming international (internationalisation), we observe, is a strategy for social positioning, a means of upward social mobility: students seek to internationalise their studies, and professionals internationalise their curriculum vitae, careers and social networks.’

In other words, to what extent do the ‘Numerous F’s offer social, symbolic and cultural capital accumulation for stakeholders? After all, the resultant schooling experience is very different from that offered by public schools, or even other forms of elite private education. How does this affect the children who attend these schools? Do they feel different? Will this offer future advantages within the

global market-place? It is acknowledged (Wright and Lee, 2019), in a Hong Kong context, that the concept offers the potential for producing, and reproducing, a 'Global Middle Class', with similar outlooks, values and 'mindset'.

Further, there is a platform here for helping the parents to develop social capital, through socialising and networking. For instance, the 'Festivals' provide an excuse and an arena for developing relationships with other groups of parents. Is this another feature of the emergent 'Global Middle Class' (Ball and Nikita, 2014), a newly emerging class-in-formation? Is this one reason why they choose such a school? Within this vein of discussion, do the educators within these schools also become institutionalised, and further developed as 'Internationally-Minded Educators'? Do they, in turn, also join this new 'Global Middle Class' (see the emergent discussion by Tarc, Mishra Tarc and Wu, 2019). Is this the price worth paying for the associated instability and 'precarity' (Bunnell, 2016; Poole, 2019)?

The serious point to observe here is that the 'Numerous Fs' do not only affect the school, conveying important messages to both the internal and external communities that develop organisational identity, and a sense of institutional legitimacy. They may also act to institutionalise, and potentially advantage, the agents within. Maybe this is what now attracts some parents, and educators? There is the basis here for substantial further sociological discussion and research.

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